A draft framework for understanding the value of Aboriginal knowledge in the design and planning of places
Design objectives for NSW

Seven objectives define the key considerations in the design of the built environment.

Better fit contextual, local and of its place

Better performance sustainable, adaptable and durable

Better for community inclusive, connected and diverse

Better for people safe, comfortable and liveable

Better working functional, efficient and fit for purpose

Better value creating and adding value

Better look and feel engaging, inviting and attractive
Contributors and acknowledgements

This draft framework has been informed by engagement through interviews and workshop discussions with selected stakeholders including an Advisory Panel of Traditional Custodians, representatives from community organisations, and government. This document has been written by and with Aboriginal experts in spatial design in collaboration with Government Architect NSW (GANSW) staff.

We express our deep gratitude to the following individuals and communities who have contributed to the development of this draft framework:

Connecting with Country Cultural Advisory Panel
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Aboriginal consultant and advisory organisations
Balarinji
Djinjama Indigenous Corporation
Future Black Design Studio
Carroll Go-Sam
Old Ways, New

NSW Government
Aboriginal Affairs; Department of Planning, Industry and Environment including: the Aboriginal Strategy and Outcomes team, Aboriginal Network and the Science, Economics and Insights Division; Infrastructure NSW; NSW Treasury; Department of Regional NSW; NSW Health Infrastructure; NSW Department of Education including Schools Infrastructure; Greater Sydney Commission.

Local government
Aboriginal liaison officers from Sydney City, Parramatta, Cumberland, Campsie, Canterbury-Bankstown, and Northern Beaches councils.

Local Aboriginal land councils
Deerubbin, Metropolitan, La Perouse, Gandangara, Tharawal.

Aboriginal organisations
Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation,
Darug Tribal Aboriginal Corporation,
Kurranulla Aboriginal Organisation,
Aboriginal Housing Company, Guringai Tribal Link Aboriginal Corporation.

Other key consultants and organisations
Tyrrell Studio
Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians, the First Peoples of Australia. We acknowledge their many Countries, knowledges and cultures. We acknowledge their evolving, living cultures and dynamic relationships with Country. We pay our respects to their Elders – past, present, and future. We also pay our respects to the cultural knowledge-holders who have guided us in the development of this project.

Government does not speak for Country in the sense that word is understood by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, this project is led by Aboriginal professionals within NSW Government collaborating with Aboriginal Traditional Custodians and knowledge-holders. NSW is Aboriginal land, so throughout this document Aboriginal people are referred to specifically, rather than First Nations, or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Connecting with Country is informed largely by the experiences and knowledges of people who work on, and are from, Countries in and around the Sydney basin. As such, the principles and framework that follow reflect an emphasis on this part of NSW and we acknowledge that further work is required to determine the appropriateness of these principles and framework for the other Countries of NSW.

Peter Peckham of First Lesson Cultural Tours, Dubbo sharing his knowledge of Aboriginal canoe trees. Image: Destination NSW.
Constant change requires us to continuously reimagine our way of living. And this way of thinking about renewal and change requires leadership and willingness to challenge business-as-usual practices within government. We are taking up the challenge to provide leadership and cultural advice to government – Connecting with Country asks you to take up the challenge of thinking differently, working differently, and making decisions that prioritise Country.

There’s a genuine desire to take up this challenge across government and within industry – and we believe that everyone can contribute to making the value of Aboriginal culture visible in the design and planning of our built environment. Connecting with Country is part of a series of programs within the Department of Planning, Industry, and Environment that aim to show people the right ways to do this.

Since time immemorial, our ancestors, the First Peoples, have been caring for Country in a sustainable way, passing on this continuing responsibility and custodianship to countless generations. As a consequence, profound relationships have been forged with Mother Earth and other ancestral beings which underpin this culture of caring for Country. Our knowledge systems are inherently part of our spiritual practices – often conflated with religion but in fact more like a vast database of wisdom.

Pre-colonial artefacts not only provide important evidence people were already living in Australia – these objects have greater value in connecting us to stories and memories of Country. We’ve always known this value, and it’s encouraging to be working in a time when more people – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike – are beginning to appreciate that value.

In Partnership with the Department of Regional NSW, the Our Place on Country Strategy reflects how we will aim to empower Aboriginal voices within decision-making; give Aboriginal people greater choice, access and control over land, water, housing and resources within the State; drive success in Aboriginal organisations and businesses; and create better outcomes for every Aboriginal person in NSW.

We value the strong Aboriginal networks across our departments and the richness they bring to our workplaces and the lives of our employees. We encourage opportunities for Aboriginal people within our departments and support the networks that advance our aspirations. Piloting and developing this Connecting with Country Draft Framework will support us all to realise those aspirations.

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Introduction

This document is a draft framework for developing connections with Country to inform the planning, design, and delivery of built environment projects in NSW. It is intended to help project development teams—advocating ways they can respond to changes and new directions in planning policy relating to Aboriginal culture and heritage, as well as place-led design approaches. It also aims to help project teams gain a better understanding of, and to better support, a strong and vibrant Aboriginal culture in our built environment.

It is for community—to help communities advocate their own project initiatives and find common ground, as well as acknowledging diverse perspectives and stories and relationships to Country.

It is for local government—to help them respond to and advocate for community needs in local planning policies and projects.

It is for government agencies—to be better clients by building relationships with communities on Country.

It is for industry—to support better work practices, relationship building, and delivery of better built environment outcomes that are informed and guided by Aboriginal knowledge and leadership.

It is for developers (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)—to understand the unique value of Country and the reciprocal nature of that value.

This Connecting with Country Draft Framework is being tested through a collaborative process with NSW Government delivery agencies. The testing and piloting of this framework will also include deep engagement with Aboriginal people across NSW to inform long-term implementation and to demonstrate the commitment of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to nurturing strong relationships with Aboriginal communities.

Connecting with Country Draft Framework is intended to augment and support the work of Aboriginal colleagues and community leaders who have developed protocols and policies for engaging with Aboriginal communities, providing Aboriginal employment opportunities, design protocols, and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Strategic goals and a long-term commitment

The ambition of Connecting with Country is that everyone who is involved in delivering government projects will adopt the following commitment:

Through our projects, we commit to helping support the health and wellbeing of Country by valuing, respecting, and being guided by Aboriginal people, who know that if we care for Country—it will care for us.

The ambition of the commitment to improving health and wellbeing of Country is to help realise three long-term strategic goals:

—reduce the impacts of natural events such as fire, drought, and flooding through sustainable land and water use practices
—value and respect Aboriginal cultural knowledge with Aboriginal people co-leading design and development of all NSW infrastructure projects
—ensure Country is cared for appropriately and sensitive sites are protected by Aboriginal people having access to their homelands to continue their cultural practices.

Connecting with Country Draft Framework is intended to be the starting point to improve and inform better processes that will help to achieve these goals and to deliver on the Connecting with Country commitments that are outlined in this document.

Connecting with Country is intended to assist all of us—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people—to work together collectively, respectfully, and with open minds to unite our complementary knowledge. We need to have curious minds, be prepared for cultural immersion, and allow for other knowledge to be heard. We also need to give permission for others to make their own connection with Country.
Connecting with Country Draft Framework is a set of pathways, commitments, and principles for action intended to help form, design, and deliver government infrastructure including building projects such as roads, transport, and major public facilities. This draft will be tested with project teams and communities over the course of 12 months to understand how best to implement Connecting with Country, and what the long-term opportunities might be for all built environment projects across NSW.

Connecting with Country takes an Aboriginal perspective that provides practical ways for government, planners, designers, and industry to address the legislative requirements of the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act) and key policies – specifically object (f): “to promote the sustainable management of built and cultural heritage (including Aboriginal cultural heritage)”. By extension, Connecting with Country will also support teams to address object (g) “to promote good design and amenity of the built environment”.

Connecting with Country will support design and planning industry engagement with Aboriginal culture and heritage. Its principles for action will help to realise projects that:
— protect the health and wellbeing of Country and therefore of Aboriginal communities, and by extension all communities
— embed Aboriginal knowledge into the design and planning of our built environment to make NSW a better place for all its citizens.

Connecting with Country commitments and principles for action are intended to ensure that Aboriginal communities retain intellectual property rights over authorship and definition of their cultural knowledge, including how their knowledge is shared with others.

The Connecting with Country framework is made up of elements (see Figure 1) which are outlined in this document. For quick reference, this document also includes a summary of key lessons to reflect on.
Context

The NSW context
The NSW Premier’s Priorities on greening our cities and open spaces have urgent relevance. Included in these priorities is a call to increase leadership by Aboriginal people, within government, to inform its decision-making and service delivery.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is well-placed to address these priorities because it brings together specialists in urban and regional planning, natural resources, industry, environment, heritage, and Aboriginal and social housing. Our unique tactic for addressing these priorities is to embed Aboriginal cultural knowledge into our work practices and behaviour. The Department’s strategy Our Place on Country1 is providing direction and guidance for Department staff on how to deliver health and wellbeing benefits to Country and Aboriginal communities, aligned with the NSW Government’s OCHRE Plan2.

Supporting Our Place on Country, this guide focuses on design and planning outcomes. Since 2018, the value of Aboriginal culture and perspectives has also been examined in various design and planning forums and captured in the GANSW discussion paper, Designing with Country3.

The wider context
Connecting with Country is informed by and reflects a wider context of debate and policy as well as academic research. The commitments and principles for action are closely informed by the lived experience of Aboriginal people who have written and contributed to this document.

That lived experience includes participation in a living culture with tens of thousands of years of history. It also includes responses to historic consequences of colonisation, to cultural reform, and to global impacts of climate change.

In the international context, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has helped to create a momentum for projects such as this one which give voice to Aboriginal and other First Nations peoples in the development of policy.
This document supports the broad range of policies and advice provided by Government Architect NSW (GANSW). Starting with Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW (GANSW 2017), Connecting with Country informs and should be considered alongside all GANSW guidance.

Figure 4: Relationship with other GANSW advice

Piloting and testing the draft framework

The NSW Government has made a significant effort and investment to support inclusion, engagement, employment, and opportunities for Aboriginal people, including through plans and policies such as the NSW Regional Plans and more recently through Urban Design for Regional NSW (GANSW 2020). Connecting with Country links the intent of recent policy with the processes of designing and planning the built environment, and provides guidance for project teams that are required to realise these intentions.

However, in order to ensure that project teams are pursuing this approach successfully and appropriately, it is vital this framework is tested and piloted with project teams and with Aboriginal communities. To provide adequate time for testing the proposed pathways, commitments, and principles for action, Connecting with Country will be piloted across several current government projects for 12 months before a final draft is released.

The experiences gained from this testing period about the pathways, commitments, and actions will inform future project formation processes, and will further develop our understanding of the relationships between projects, Country, and Aboriginal communities.

Pilot projects will test the impact of the framework to determine:
— where they can be applied to support the health and wellbeing of Country
— how to mandate these principles across all government infrastructure projects
— how to embed values of Country in early stages of strategic planning.

If you would like to learn more about the pilot program as it progresses through 2021, or provide your input to the development of the Connecting with Country Framework, you can register your interest here: connectingwithcountry@planning.nsw.gov.au.

You can also keep up to date through webinar information sessions and information on our website during the pilot period: gansw.nsw.gov.au.
SECTION ONE

STARTING WITH COUNTRY
1.1 What is Country?

Country is living, constantly changing, and evolving. Many ecosystems exist across different realms of Country including both living and non-living elements. Country has purpose, operating at multiple scales from the cosmic to the molecular and everything in between.

Many early post-contact buildings, parks, and roads are located on the original meeting grounds and pathways created by Aboriginal peoples. Hyde Park in the Sydney CBD was previously an Aboriginal ceremonial contest ground. Parramatta Road connected Aboriginal communities from Wiradjuri Country, through the Blue Mountains to Sydney, passing an important gathering area now established as Victoria Park, The University of Sydney. The buildings and places constructed during early colonisation reflect the purpose of places originally built and cared for by Aboriginal people.

“Country” (capital C) has a specific and significant meaning for Aboriginal peoples. In the Aboriginal sense of the word, Country relates to the nation or cultural group and land that we belong to, yearn for, find healing from and will return to. However, Country means much more than land, it is our place of origin in cultural, spiritual and literal terms. It includes not only land but also skies and waters. Country incorporates both the tangible and the intangible, for instance, all the knowledges and cultural practices associated with land. People are part of Country, and our identity is derived in a large way in relation to Country.

—Dr Danièle Hromek, Budawang/Yuin, Researcher and spatial designer, 2019

We are all, always on Country
“When people talk about country it is spoken of like a person: we speak to country, we sing to country, we worry about country, and we long for country.”
—Common Ground First Nations Connection to Country

Aboriginal people have deep and personal relationships with Country and multiple ways of expressing that relationship and what it means. Consequently, there is no single way of defining the term.

“Descriptions of country, particularly traditional associations, will differ from individual to individual, depending on the associations passed down through the family and community.”
—Queensland Studies Authority, 2008 Indigenous Perspectives Resource

Aboriginal placenames, language groups, and nations noted in this document can be located on the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Map of Indigenous Australia.

While Horton’s map (Figure 5) doesn’t reveal the many complex dimensions of Country, it does show the rich diversity of language, tribal, or nation groups of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. AIATSIS acknowledges “the information on which the map is based is contested and may not be agreed to by some Traditional Custodians. The borders between groups are purposefully represented as slightly blurred”. There are further delineations between different language or nation groups at a finer grain scale as well.

Figure 5: AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia
The AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia, Image: David R Horton (creator), © Aboriginal Studies Press, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) 1996.
Country and culture

The many interpretations of Country are expressed through cultural practice. Culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, and customs acquired by membership in a social group. Knowledge, habits, and capabilities all make up culture.

While this document refers to Country as “she” or “her”, to support the idea that Country is a living entity which is a concept commonly held by Aboriginal language groups, there are Aboriginal cultural practices where Country is not gendered.

“Cultural identity is the sense of belonging to a distinct group. First Peoples’ identities are deeply linked to culture, community and the land, and this is a key factor to health and wellbeing.”


Identity

Cultural identity and a sense of belonging to Country and community is strongly linked to health and emotional wellbeing.

Aboriginal peoples’ continued connection with Country over the course of millennia is a source of valuable wisdom and knowledge that can guide all of us to improve the way we plan and design the places where we live, work, and play.

As societies become more diverse, cultural boundaries are blurring and so too are the ways in which individuals are defining themselves. Sensitivity to this is paramount when working with Aboriginal communities.

For all people – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – culture defines us and makes us who we are.

Figure 6: Interrelationships between Country, community and individuals. Reciprocal relationships with Country and community form cultural practices, which in turn shape individual identities. All are also influenced by external factors including environment, politics, and wider society.

Young girl from the Barkindji Nation preparing leaves for a smoking ceremony in Wilcannia. Image: Destination NSW.
1.2 Thinking differently about Country

Prioritising people and their needs is widely regarded as fundamental in contemporary design and planning processes.

An Indigenous or Aboriginal world view suggests there are limitations imposed by an entirely human-centred approach to design.

If people and their needs are at the “centre” of design considerations, then the landscape and nature are reduced to second-order priorities. If design and planning processes consider natural systems that include people, animals, resources and plants equally – similar to an Aboriginal world view – this could make a significant contribution to a more sustainable future world.

In Figure 6, in the “human-centred”, or ego-centric triangle the human, non-human, and Country (where Country is the thick line below) are represented as discreet and separate elements in a hierarchy. In the “Country-centred”, or eco-centric circle the human and non-human are represented as integrated in a network of relationships through Country – all supporting each other.

It’s a simple representation of a complex idea, but the concept illustrated here is a useful reminder of the fundamental change in thinking that connecting with Country requires.

KEY LEARNINGS:

Thinking differently about Country means prioritising Country

Gaining cultural awareness is the first critical step towards connecting with Country

Gaining an understanding of Country requires leadership from Aboriginal people

Figure 6: Human-centred or Country-centred:
Image: Diagram adapted from German architect Steffen Lehmann, Eco v Ego diagram 2010

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SECTION TWO

STRATEGIES FOR CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY
2.1 STRATEGY 1
Pathways for connecting

Cultural awareness must come first. Having committed to prioritising Country and invested in growing cultural awareness, we can then establish project plans and develop project life cycle processes with an Aboriginal perspective.

There are many literature and cultural awareness training courses available to help support good engagement processes using the principles of equal engagement and mutual accountability. Many Aboriginal artists, designers, and writers have used historical topics to inform works that can help us to gain understanding about themes like early resistance and warfare, retribution, forced removal from Country and family, assimilation, recognition and being included in the national census, activism, human and land rights, reconciliation, national apology, and constitutional reform.

Developing cultural awareness, like the project life cycle, is ongoing – we need to repeatedly return and check our cultural awareness, and refine our action planning to ensure the best outcomes for the project and for the community it will serve.

Aboriginal people connect with Country in many ways – these selected examples demonstrate that cultural values, behaviours, and Country are fundamental to each other.

Cultural awareness offers some pathways to help projects align with Aboriginal values, as a way of connecting with Country. As a minimum all four of these pathways need to be followed to protect and maintain Aboriginal culture and heritage.

A good project example of this strategy is Nimmie-Caira Wetlands, see case study on page 25.
Cultural expression

Cultural expression takes many forms including performance, ceremony, collection and preparation of food, song, dance, art, clothing, and tools. Perhaps the most primal of all is language. All of these forms of expression contain deep knowledge about Country, like a database.

PATHWAY 1: Learning from first languages and placenames

Engage with First Nations’ languages and the meaning of first placenames to learn more about Country. First placenames universally describe the physical character and purpose of Country, e.g. Parramatta – the eel’s water place.

When we speak another language, we think differently. Therefore, by speaking and understanding the meaning of first languages and placenames we are better able to connect with Country.

From an Aboriginal perspective, Country is continuously speaking to us. Country tells us who she is in placenames like Parramatta (in Darug language: burra – eel; matta – water place). Country tells us who we are, for example Gadigal (in Darug language: gadi – grass tree; gal – male people) and Country gives us our language from the sounds we hear her speaking and repeat back to her such as the kingfisher bird called kookaburra (in Wiradjuri language: Guuguuburra). Cultural lore was also developed by lessons learnt from Country, such as observing weather patterns affecting seasonal changes. An example of this is a version of the Dharawal calendar, that describes the observable rhythms of Country as the six seasons of Sydney (see Figure 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burran</th>
<th>Male kangaroos aggressive</th>
<th>Meat forbidden</th>
<th>Weetjellan blooming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hot and dry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrai’gang</td>
<td>Quolls seeking mates</td>
<td>Lillypilly ripens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet becoming cool</td>
<td>Echidna seeking mates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrai’uo</td>
<td>Burringoa flowering</td>
<td>Shellfish forbidden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm and wet</td>
<td>Summer heat starts</td>
<td>Miwa Gawaian in flower</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngoonungi</td>
<td>Cool becoming warm</td>
<td>Flying-foxes appear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold becoming warm</td>
<td>Lyrebird building mounds</td>
<td>Ceremonial time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiritjiribin</td>
<td>Shellfish flowering</td>
<td>Gentle spring rains</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold and frosty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parra’dowee</td>
<td>Warm and wet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8: Dharawal seasons cycle (adapted from Bureau of Meteorology)*
Relationship with Country

Building relationships requires time, sharing emotions and experiences. Strong bonds to immediate as well as extended family are a central tenet of Aboriginal cultural values.

Aboriginal people believe that Country has a spirit and is living. This is expressed through a collective and individual responsibility and obligation to care for Country as if she were family. Some Aboriginal people would say more specifically that Country is the Mother, rather than family, and that the family is bigger still, including cultural concepts of Grandfather Sun, Grandmother Moon, Father Sky.

As discussed in previous sections, Country is also understood to encompass concepts beyond a humanistic figure of motherhood, including environment, spirituality, society, laws, and language.

An example of how contemporary Aboriginal cultural practice expresses the reciprocal relationship with Country is cultural burning. Fire has always been (and continues to be) a tool used by Aboriginal people to provide environmental care for Country by being in a reciprocal relationship with nature. It is deployed in an intelligent and systematic way to gently burn grasses and clear understorey debris thereby decreasing fuel load and making it easier to control. Although much of Australia’s bushland requires heat to regenerate, the aim is not to destroy the tree or its canopy which provides animal and bird habitat as well as essential shade for reducing ground moisture loss and water evaporation.

An Aboriginal perspective shows an eco-systemic way of considering the issue of being in an environment that needs fire, but can also be destroyed by fire. Rather than interfering with or fighting against this ancient rhythm of burning and regeneration, we could instead adapt and synchronise with it.

Momentum has been building in recent years to use eco-systems thinking and apply an integrated approach to reduce stress on our environment. Reciprocal relationships with Country are being modelled by government, local councils, and community volunteer groups who are:
- targeting equitable access for everyone through sustainable extraction practices
- ensuring clean water quality by minimising entry of pollutants
- providing healthy habitats for animals and aquatic life
- protecting and revitalising riparian corridors to achieve critical environmental cooling – retaining ground moisture and minimising water evaporation.

The deep connection between humans and nature is well-documented. There are studies which suggest that all humans have capacity for a special relationship with the environment and that we thrive when connected to nature. This is well understood in the Japanese practice – *shinrin-yoku* – sometimes referred to as “forest bathing”.

By extending this idea of individual connection to nature, the connection between culture and place becomes clearer. We all have a degree of awareness of how our cultural identity is linked to a sense of place – whether that be in nature or in the built environment.

A standard project requirement is to undertake consultation with Aboriginal communities, typically done in a formal way and with limited time. Protocols that are established with local Aboriginal communities, lands councils and recognised Aboriginal knowledge-holders should be seen as a valuable foundation on which to build long-term relationships – not just one-off engagement processes. Building relationships with Aboriginal people requires appropriate allocation of time and resources to develop personal connections in ways Aboriginal people recommend. These strong relationships should include opportunities for Aboriginal people to provide leadership and guidance for built environment projects – from the beginning and throughout the project life cycle.
Learning from Country

The desire to learn extends beyond our base survival instincts – the human mind is inquisitive by nature. Humans are driven to explore, know, and ultimately explain the world and universe in which we belong.

As they have done for thousands of years, Aboriginal people continue to learn from walking Country. Walking Country is a cultural practice that allows Aboriginal people to communicate with Country in a sensory way – listening, feeling, smelling, as well as seeing. It is an opportunity for Elders to teach younger generations about social behaviour obligations and responsibilities to both community and Country.

PATHWAY 3: Reawakening memories of cultural landscapes

In addition to doing a site analysis, encourage walking on Country and using all the senses, including sight, to more deeply understand places. This must be done by walking with Aboriginal knowledge-holders and Traditional Custodians.

When walking on Country you are also exposed to negative ions. Negative ions are molecules floating in the air or atmosphere that have been charged with electricity, and they exist in nature including from the sun, from waves crashing on the beach, from waterfalls, and from plants. Research suggests that exposure to negative ions can have positive effects on the body, such as:

— reducing symptoms of depression for some people
— having an activating influence on some body systems and cognitive performance
— promoting antimicrobial activity.
Knowledge-sharing can be intimate and help bond people together. Within Aboriginal communities intergenerational teaching and learning is an important cultural value shared two ways between Elders and younger groups.

Connecting with Country represents a subtle but radical shift in process and practice that requires all of us to reconsider our ways of thinking and of making decisions that affect Country.

As part of family, Country welcomes us all to learn how to live sustainably with her. All humans have an innate ability to do this.

Knowledge is contained within the cultural expression of many First Nations peoples. The challenge for project teams – including Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal team members – is to step outside their own cultural comfort zone and be open to other ways of recognising and receiving knowledge.

Culture is learned from the people you interact with as well as the natural and spiritual world that surrounds us. Elements of culture viewed in isolation may seem strange, but can make more sense when considered within an overall integrated system.

Knowledge-sharing can help us to overcome barriers. Designing solutions to complex problems requires many dissimilar minds and points of view, often referred to as brainstorming or collective problem-solving. Common barriers to problem-solving include the desire to defend one’s personal beliefs over those of someone else, or to want to solve problems in a familiar “tried and tested” way.

When it comes to knowledge-sharing, it is vitally important that Aboriginal people retain authorship and control of their cultural knowledge and intellectual property, and how it is shared with others. Aboriginal people must be invited to co-design and co-manage projects rather than just be asked to provide their cultural knowledge, stories, and insights to help develop projects.

KEY LEARNINGS:
Together, the strategies for connecting will help to apply cultural awareness and knowledge of Country to projects.

Through cultural awareness all project team members can begin to follow these pathways:
— learning from first languages and placenames
— developing mutually beneficial relationships with Country
— reawakening memories of cultural landscapes
— finding common ground.

PATHWAY 4: Finding common ground
Through sharing knowledge and ways of knowing we can begin to find common approaches that will support the health and wellbeing of Country. In this way, Aboriginal knowledge systems can be supported and better appreciated with input from Western scientific knowledge systems. Aboriginal ways of knowing and eco-systemic thinking observes natural phenomena from a holistic point of view within which those natural phenomena sit comfortably within complex systems. Being guided by this kind of knowledge system may be challenging in systems and processes where Western science and culture has predominated.
Gayini (Nari-Nari word for water) (Nimmie-Caira) is a super-property purchased in 2013 under an agreement between the Australian and NSW governments.

Completed in 2017, the project covers 86,000 hectares of internationally significant floodplain in southern NSW. It adjoins the Murrumbidgee river for approximately 90 km between the towns of Maude and Balranald.

Components of the project included:

— purchasing property and water entitlements from landholders to meet sustainable diversion limits
— setting targets to meet environmental water demand within and beyond the project area
— addressing Aboriginal cultural heritage and environmental values and other land managed for commercial use
— reconfiguring water delivery infrastructure
— collaborating with the Nari Nari Tribal Council, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and the Centre for Ecosystem Science at the University of NSW.

Images of Gayine (Nimmie-Caira) project:
Water Resources Team, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

ENGAGEMENT CONSULTANT:
Nari Nari Tribal Council

NIMMIE-CAIRA FUTURE STEWARDSHIP:
The Nature Conservancy, Nari Nari Tribal Council, the Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and the Centre for Ecosystem Science at the University of NSW

CLIENT: Water Resources Team, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

2.2 STRATEGY 2

Considering project life cycles with an Aboriginal perspective

Country can never be fully known. Aboriginal language, wisdom and ideas of Country show a different way of thinking about how, as humans, we shape the built and natural environments.

The complex and dynamic relationships that characterise Country mean that making a connection with Country is not a task that will ever be completed, but rather an ongoing commitment to pay attention and to evolve our understanding – before, during, and beyond the time frame of a single project life cycle.

Because cultural connections with Country are different for all Aboriginal people and communities, all projects and their strategy to connect with Country must be guided by Aboriginal people who are acknowledged by their communities as knowledge-holders for Country, or the nominated spokespeople for knowledge-holders (for example, local area lands councils).

A good project example of this strategy is Echo Point Visitor Centre, see case study on page 29.

Understanding how words are used in another language to explain something can change our thinking about places and processes. The re-occurring and ongoing sequence of experience and understanding that typically describes project life-cycle stages can be understood differently through an Aboriginal perspective, beginning with using different words.

To create the opportunity for built environment projects to connect with Country, we need to think differently through new words that reflect physical experiences of Country. For example:

- **Project formation** can be understood as an immersive process of sensing – the point at which we start with Country.
- **Project design and conceptualisation** can be understood as process of imagining – listening to Country.
- **Project delivery** can be understood as a process of shaping – designing with Country.
- **Project maintenance** can be understood as part of an ongoing continuum of caring for Country.

The terms sensing, imagining, shaping, and caring are preliminary suggestions – however there may be other terms preferred by the Aboriginal communities and their knowledge-holders who are contributing to any given project.

Country is more than just an idea. It is related to the origins of the landscapes that we inhabit and therefore our own origins. Connecting with Country occurs through every sense, movement, and through stories. It is related to knowledges, actions, and experiences, so happens best through physical activities, and being on Country.

—Dr Danièle Hromek, 2019
Sensing – Start with Country (project formation)

Sensing Country is related to Listening to Country but it is more than just listening, it is actively seeking the sense of Country. Dharug/ Gadigal, Gundungurra, Yuin/Budawang Elder Uncle Greg Simms related to Danièle Hromek in conversation to watch out when travelling for the changes from one Country to another, as each feels different. However, it is also important to sense Country when not in movement. While it may be easier to sense Country in non-urban areas outside the city, it is important to try to sense Country in urban contexts because, despite there being so much sensory interference, Country still exists in the city and it needs to be heard, felt, and responded to.

Imagining – Listen to Country (project design and conceptualisation)

Listening to Country with the guidance of Aboriginal knowledge-holders is a critical part of engaging with Country and with community. An important aspect of connecting with Country is to allow Aboriginal communities to speak about Country in a way they feel comfortable. Being mindful of the important questions to ask is a good start:
— What is the story of the place?
— What are the indicators for success?
— What is the history of the site?
— What are the needs of the place?
— What is the purpose of this place?

Judy Atkinson and Danièle Hromek both write about deep listening, watching for the signals of Country, the communications Country sends to us to ensure Country is heard and therefore cared for. Deep listening is more than just hearing with ears; it is hearing with other parts of ourselves at a profound level; it is the search for understanding and meaning. Listening invites responsibility to get the story (information) right while understanding the story changes over time.
Shaping – Design with Country
(project delivery)

Many ecosystems exist across Country including both living and non-living elements. Rocks for example have a relationship to the place they rest in, being formed from material of that location. Consequently, making from and on Country respects and allows this relationship to continue.

When Country is being cared for it provides an opportunity for creative actions – making or shaping – to take place. The maker or designer enhances their connection to Country by making on Country. Collecting materials of Country can be part of this process, using correct protocols of collecting.
—Dr Danièle Hromek 2019

Caring for Country
(project maintenance)

Once built on Country, all projects then belong to and are in a relationship with Country including buildings, roads, and parks. Therefore, together they should be cared for as a related system. If the early phases of a project have been guided by Aboriginal knowledge-holders and their local expertise, and if the project is developed with cultural awareness and a commitment to enabling connection with Country, then this relationship between the project and Country can be a mutually beneficial one.

Aboriginal people use the term “caring for Country” to describe their deep affection and responsibility for looking after her health and wellbeing. The term is used with respect by those who understand its meaning and should not be misappropriated as a catchphrase. This is also critical to achieving a mutually beneficial relationship between project and Country. If built environment projects can help Aboriginal people to fulfil their obligation and responsibility to care for Country, then Country will care for us all.

Peter Peckham of First Lesson Cultural Tours, Dubbo sharing his knowledge of Aboriginal bush medicine and bush tucker plants. Image: Destination NSW.

KEY LEARNINGS:

Use Aboriginal perspectives including communities, preferred use of language to support the standard approach to deliver design and planning projects.

Apply pathways to connect with Aboriginal cultural values at each stage of project delivery.
Yatu Widders-Hunt (Anaiwan Dunghutti) shared a story about how listening to Traditional Custodians can teach designers and planners to create a sense of experience in their projects.

In the development of the Echo Point Visitor Centre (in the NSW Blue Mountains) advice from Dharug and Gundungara Traditional Custodians was sought to inform the design and planning of the new centre. The discussions challenged expectations for the engagement consultants because the community led the talks in a direction that was about the feeling and the purpose of the place, instead of ideas about what the design would be in the end.

They questioned how the design would create a sense of connection with the place. How would it facilitate a particular way of being on the site – a way of being respectful and aware of the importance of the place? How would it make spaces for experiences that acknowledged the different stories and experiences that different community groups wanted to share? What will people see and feel as they approach the site, and when they arrive, or when they sit down?

This perspective from different community groups allowed the team to find common ground and to design a visitor centre that reflected this process of facilitating diversity within Aboriginal communities and practice of living culture. The process ensured the design didn’t simply represent a particular version of history, but that it could enable a deeper appreciation and experience of culture.

The Traditional Custodians challenged the design team to find ways of creating a special and place-specific experience for visitors that was unique to Echo Point, and which enhanced their experience of Country. Specialist consultants, Cox Inall Ridgeway enabled the team to have a discussion with the community that was culturally informed and open to discussion about how the Traditional Custodians wanted the project to respond to Country in terms of experience.

ENGAGEMENT CONSULTANT: Yatu Widders-Hunt (Cox Inall Ridgeway)
ARCHITECT: CHROFI and Breakspear Architects
CLIENT: Blue Mountains City Council

Scenic views of the Three Sisters and the Jamison Valley, Blue Mountains National Park. Image: Destination NSW.
SECTION THREE

IMPLEMENTING

CONNECTING

WITH

COUNTRY
Pearl Gibbs street art in Dubbo painted by artist Matt Adnate. Image: Destination NSW.
3.1 Statements of commitment and principles for action

To help project teams fulfill their commitment to Country, the principles for action and considerations provided here are practical ways of implementing each of the seven commitments.

Throughout the 12-month testing period, we will work with project teams and Aboriginal communities to understand how these commitments and principles can work most effectively to support the health and wellbeing of Country. For all projects, providing opportunities for Aboriginal people to give guidance and leadership about how to fulfill these commitments will be fundamental to achieving a connection with Country.

1. We will respect the rights of Aboriginal peoples to Indigenous cultural intellectual property, and we will support the right of Country to be cared for.

2. We will prioritise Aboriginal people’s relationship to Country, and their cultural protocols, through education and enterprise by and for Aboriginal people.

3. We will prioritise financial and economic benefits to the Country where we are working, and by extension to the Traditional Custodians of that Country.

4. We will share tangible and intangible benefits with the Country where we are working, and by extension the Traditional Custodians of that Country, including current and future generations.

PRINCIPLES FOR ACTION

Connect with Country through first languages in collaboration with local community groups and their recognised Aboriginal knowledge-holders.

Incorporate shared histories of cultural landscapes into project design principles.

Connect with Country by engaging with, and responding to, cultural practices led by community groups and their recognised Aboriginal knowledge-holders with spiritual links to Country.

Include impacts to Country and culture when evaluating economic, environmental, and social benefits and disadvantages of the project.

Develop indicators to measure impacts to Country and culture during project formation.

CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Work with Traditional Custodians and draw upon available research to understand the connections between the ways of relating and recording knowledge.

How are you building relationships with the Aboriginal community – both the Traditional Custodians and community members from off-Country?

How will the project help Traditional Custodians to continue their practices on Country?

What are the opportunities for education and enterprise for Aboriginal community groups from the earliest stages through to maintenance?

Create a clear framework for identifying the group of people that will benefit from / influence / guide the project – be clear about how views will be considered and how contested ideas will be resolved.

Agree on what success looks like for the project in terms of the health and wellbeing of Country.

Be clear about how financial benefits of the project (not just engagement fees) will be shared with community.
5. We will respect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, but we will prioritise the local, place-specific cultural identity of the Country we’re working on. Aboriginal people will determine the representation of their cultural materials, customs, and knowledge.

6. We will prioritise recognition and responsibility of Aboriginal people, supporting capacity building across Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and across government project teams.

7. We will support Aboriginal people to continue their practices of managing land, water, and air through their ongoing reciprocal relationships with Country.

We will create opportunities for traditional first cultures to flourish.

PRINCIPLES FOR ACTION

Build relationships with local Aboriginal communities and incorporate enterprise opportunities for Aboriginal businesses (local and beyond, existing and emerging) at all stages through the project life cycle, including future opportunities.

Partner with Aboriginal-owned and run businesses and professional services, from project formation through to delivery and maintenance, to help guide design and engagement processes.

Identify and nurture immediate and longer term opportunities to support cultural practice on Country – through the development and delivery of the project as well as future use.

CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Establish (or learn about) protocols for Aboriginal consultants from off-Country – local government authorities often have information relating to this.

Consider how people are given space to participate. Avoid exploitative processes and allow sufficient budget and time.

What are the opportunities for education and enterprise for Aboriginal community groups from the earliest stages through to maintenance?

How will the project help Traditional Custodians continue their practices on Country?
3.2 Measuring success and learning from failure

Measuring successful implementation of the pathways, commitments, and principles will be determined on a project-by-project basis.

Through a number of government projects – including planning projects, transport, health and other infrastructure – testing and reviewing and listening to frank and critical feedback is central to the development of a long-term approach to connecting with Country.

Table 1 provides a series of preliminary indicators that will be used to measure how well (or not) the pilot projects are able to address the ambitions of the strategic goals by implementing the Connecting with Country Draft Framework of pathways, commitments, and actions. It is anticipated the testing period will reveal other potential indicators.

3.3 Time frame for implementation

The following time frame is proposed for implementing Connecting with Country across NSW built environment projects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing period:</th>
<th>2021–22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pilot principles and commitments with NSW delivery agencies Build relationships with Aboriginal communities and seek their participation in the co-design of a revised Connecting with Country Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Engage the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Aboriginal Network to evaluate the value and success of pathways, commitments, and principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Embed Connecting with Country into the NSW Gateway policy framework and Gateway reviews (Infrastructure Investor Assurance Framework)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Embed Connecting with Country into Secretary’s Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) and planning assessments for all infrastructure projects</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandating Connecting with Country principles:</th>
<th>2022–23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Embed Connecting with Country into the NSW Treasury Business Case Guideline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Establish an Aboriginal Ethics Panel for government projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mandate Connecting with Country for NSW Government infrastructure projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Embed Connecting with Country into NSW land management policy and regulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC GOALS</th>
<th>PRELIMINARY INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Impacts of natural events such as fire, drought, and flooding, exacerbated by unsustainable land- and water-use practices, will be reduced.</td>
<td>Increased programs to monitor the health of Country (with a view to measuring health of Country and community in the future)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Aboriginal cultural knowledge will be valued and respected. Aboriginal knowledge-holders will co-lead design and development of all NSW infrastructure projects.</td>
<td>Improved cultural competency (across teams and individuals within agencies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aboriginal people will have access to their homelands so they can continue their responsibility to care for Country and protect sensitive sites.</td>
<td>Demonstrated commitment by client agencies to build direct relationships with relevant Aboriginal communities on Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased Aboriginal participation in lead consultant teams as well as in project co-design, decision-making, and governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased awareness of, and protection for, cultural values and Aboriginal knowledge (Aboriginal culture and heritage as well as intellectual property)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrated co-design of engagement processes with community on Country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Better Placed and Connecting with Country

Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW presents seven design objectives that can be considered through the lens of Connecting with Country.

Aligning these Better Placed objectives with a commitment to connecting with Country will ensure that our cities and towns, our landscapes, our buildings, and our public spaces across NSW are healthy, responsive, equitable, integrated, resilient, inclusive of Aboriginal culture, and considerate of Country.

In conjunction with the Connecting with Country statements of commitment, pathways, and principles for action, the Better Placed objectives can be used to guide and evaluate the design of the built environment through local planning, design, and development across a range of scales and places.

- **Better performance:** sustainable, adaptable and durable
- **Better fit:** contextual, local and of its place
- **Better for community:** inclusive, connected and diverse
- **Better for people:** safe, comfortable and liveable
- **Better working:** functional, efficient and fit for purpose
- **Better value:** creating and adding value
- **Better look and feel:** engaging, inviting and attractive

**Taking up the challenge**

The Connecting with Country statements of commitment are intended to provoke discussion within project teams about a departure from business-as-usual practices throughout all the phases of project formation, planning, design, and delivery. These are presented as commitments because this challenging task requires all of us to explore different methods and habits in our practice.

In developing this project with Aboriginal team members and community leaders, it has been very clear that the Connecting with Country Draft Framework should not be yet another layer of principles or objectives to add to a policy environment already dense with principles that are inconsistently interpreted. Instead, our collaborators identified the need for project teams – and their leaders in particular – to make a clear commitment to valuing Country, and by extension, Aboriginal culture and people.

These statements of commitment will be challenging to fulfill, but they offer us all a way to think differently.

**All project team members and their collaborators are encouraged to prepare mentally before the project commences in order to be committed to continuously apply and return to the principles and actions as the project develops, and finally, use them to evaluate project outcomes in combination with indicators for success.**

**KEY LEARNINGS:**

The commitments and actions are recommended to be used for preparing and developing projects as well as evaluating the success of project outcomes.

Indicators are drawn from strategic long-term goals.
CASE STUDIES
The following case studies demonstrate projects that have been designed to successfully connect with Country.

— Casino Aboriginal Medical Service
— Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne
— Barrangal dyara (skin and bones)
— Kamay Botany Bay National Park, Final Master Plan, Kurnell.
CASE STUDY

CASINO ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICE

Improving community health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities:
Brick paving made from local earth designates entry and waiting areas as community meeting spaces – for many people a visit to the medical centre is a very social experience. Image: Toby Scott.

QUICK FACTS

PROJECT TYPE:
Public building: community health service

LOCATION:
Casino NSW

COUNTRY:
Bundjalung

CLIENT:
Bulgarr Ngaru Medical Aboriginal Corporation, in partnership with Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH)

PROJECT SCALE:
Medium: floor area 600 m² Single storey

PROJECT COST:
$4.4 million; funded by the Federal Government through OATSIH

YEAR:
Completed 2016

PROJECT TEAM:
ARCHITECTURE
Kevin O’Brien Architects in association with AECOM

PROJECT MANAGEMENT, ENGINEERING, AND CONSTRUCTION
AECOM

PROCUREMENT PROCESS:
Traditional lump-sum contract with AECOM engaged by the Department of Health and Kevin O’Brien Architects engaged as a subconsultant to AECOM

AWARDS:
2016 Gold Coast / Northern Rivers Regional Architecture Awards – commendation
Bulgarr Ngaru Medical Aboriginal Corporation provides health services to the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr, and Yaegl people of northern NSW. For many Aboriginal communities, a medical centre is a social and often convivial meeting place for families. In response to this, Casino Aboriginal Medical Service has been designed to provide a comfortable and welcoming place for community members, recognising its role as an important social hub.

Casino, in the NSW Richmond Valley near the border of Queensland, on Bundjalung Country, is home to around 10,000 people and has strong links with the Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal Medical Service building provides a dedicated place to service the medical needs of local Aboriginal communities. It is located on one of the main streets of the town and is a single-storey, predominantly brick building planned around a central courtyard.

Sensing Country
The design of the building recognises the importance for Aboriginal people of “sensing Country”. Through the design of the roof form, the floor plan and the choice of natural materials, a sense of connection to the natural world outside (the sky or the ground) is always present – for both visitors and staff.

Along the length of a central corridor the roof tilts upward so that high-level glazing on either side lets natural light into the consultation rooms and provides a view of the sky. Walls, and in some areas floors, are predominantly brick, made from local earth. An internal courtyard provides an internal focal point and brings natural light and nature into the centre of the building.

Ways of engaging with all of the senses are employed throughout the design, expressing an understanding of “listening to Country” and “sensing Country”. Being able to translate these ideas into the design of the building has resulted in a project that is grounded in its place and community.

Asserting a strong presence in the community
Casino Aboriginal Medical Service (CAMS) has a robust street presence, firmly asserting its place in the town centre. The simple brick street elevation is strikingly different to the surrounding buildings in its flatness and refined detailing. The street front windows and entry are set back from this solid facade to provide protected openings.

Some of the facade bricks have their corners cut off to create subtle patterns in certain areas, and reveal the solidity of the wall. The cut corners of the bricks are also a way of responding to the weather. When it rains, drops gather and fall from the cut edges onto the pavement below, like tears, recognising past pains and local massacre sites. Poetic subtleties play an important symbolic role.

Recognising living culture:
Poetic subtleties play an important symbolic role. The cut corners of the facade bricks respond to the weather: when it rains, drops gather and fall from the cut edges onto the pavement below. Image: Toby Scott.
“As is common throughout Australia, the tentacles of the frontier wars linger across the past two centuries as a charged silence. This was acknowledged by cutting a window with a gun metal reveal perpendicular to the street so as to frame a view of St Mary’s Catholic Church down the road. Mediating this reconciled relationship was brick sourced from Bundjalung Country, set out as solid elevation with two patterned territories (one for mothers and one for fathers) of diagonally cut bricks either side of the window. Over time, each territory will form water stains from rain dripping down the cuts leaving crying stains bearing witness to the power of healing.”


Using bricks made from local earth
The bricks – made from the earth of Bundjalung Country – feature heavily in the design. They are used selectively, with subtle details and patterns that insert cultural meaning into specific parts of the building. Solid brick paving to the entry and courtyard provide robust and hard-wearing surfaces, as well as indicating meeting and social places.

Respecting the privacy of staff and patients
From a functional perspective, a clear distinction was required to ensure the privacy of staff and patients which is critical to the service. Consequently, the building has three distinct sections: the street-facing section accommodating public areas (waiting areas plus reception), the central consultation rooms, and the west wing accommodating staff work spaces (offices, technical rooms, meeting rooms, kitchen).

The design sought to find a way to both open and close the building to the environment, accommodating the functional requirements of privacy while still opening up to natural light where possible.

Improving community health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities:
Central to the workspace, the courtyard brings natural light into the surrounding spaces. This visual connection with the natural world helps to provide relief from high stress levels. Image: Toby Scott.

Recognising living culture:
The courtyard provides an opportunity for a planted green space of local Indigenous species. Bricks and plants connect people back to Country not only through colour and texture, but also through the scent of the plants, and the sound of the breeze through their leaves. Image: Toby Scott.

Responding to the needs of the building’s users
Providing a place that strongly addresses both the community and staff, and their specific needs, was of highest importance. There was a strong ambition to provide relief to the medical staff from the high stress levels of their job. The maximisation of natural light throughout and the provision of the central courtyard were key to this ambition.

Central to the workspace, the courtyard brings natural light into the interior spaces. Its building materials and local native plant species connect people back to Country not only through colour and texture, but also through the scent of the plants, and the sound of the breeze through the leaves.

This project is robust and strong in its presence, yet subtle in its details and methods of expressing and representing Country and the community that it serves. It embeds powerful symbolic statements through an abstract and poetic response, and illustrates a successful translation of a deep cultural understanding through its careful consideration of both the staff and community experiences and needs.
Building trust with the community through design
At the outset of the project, AECOM and the clients recognised the need for an architect who would be able to gain the trust of the community and fully understand their needs. Aboriginal architect Kevin O’Brien was appointed to work in collaboration with AECOM, staying with the project from beginning to end to ensure the integrity of the design was carried through.

O’Brien’s office were the lead designers, responsible for concept design, design development and detailed design, with AECOM providing construction documentation services and support to the design team throughout the process. O’Brien’s approach as an architect was to give the time to speak with the staff and local community, to build a sense of trust, and ensure an understanding of their critical needs and desires for the building.

“Of specific importance is that through an in-depth series of conversations with members of the community and the CAMS over a period of almost two years trust was established. Information, thoughts and feelings were shared on the back of this established trust that led to design decisions about how staff and community needed to use this building.”

Recalibrating our relationship with the built environment

Through this project, and other projects, O’Brien and his team demonstrate an approach to the design of the built environment that is an important voice in Australian contemporary architecture. The recognition of practicing Indigenous architects and the contribution they make, alongside all other practicing contemporary architects in Australia, is of enormous value in the recalibration of how we develop and understand our built environment. If we are to make any shift towards a more balanced society – where Indigenous lives, communities, and people are no longer overlooked and considered secondary or a remote issue – then we must privilege the voices of this community and provide the opportunities and support required to foster leading Indigenous voices in our field.

In this design, O’Brien not only expresses his own voice and approach, but also draws attention to the stories, history, and experiences of the local Indigenous community. Expressed in abstract ways, through the publication, writing, and speaking of these ideas and stories, a deep and powerful message is embedded within the design through its broad impact and recognition as an important work of Australian contemporary architecture.

Expressing culture through architecture

Bricks made from the earth of Bundjalung Country feature heavily throughout the design as a way of grounding it in its place. Similarly the plantings of the courtyard are indigenous species specific to the context. The planning of the building responds to specific cultural and community considerations to provide privacy where required, with social and connected spaces where appropriate.

The brick street-front facade incorporates subtle detail and patterning. The patterns are simple and abstract but deeply symbolic. They avoid literal representation, but rather consider the effect of the patterning as rain hits the facade, or the views created through from inside. They also relate the internal functions of the spaces within – considering a way of framing or demarcating spaces and views – the intangible things created or made evident through the design.

The selection of brick provides a highly durable finish. Adaptability of the design was also considered through the use of a simple structural system that is fixed and rigid, while the internal spaces are more malleable and can accommodate change. Further, the material palette and construction methods chosen are common in domestic construction. This kept the construction cost down and ensures ease of future maintenance.

Maintaining identity and ownership

As a project by an Indigenous architect, this building has enabled Indigenous people to maintain control, protect, and develop their own identity and representation of Indigenous culture within contemporary Australian architecture.

Rather than a translation and interpretation of Indigenous cultural heritage and traditional knowledge by others, the cultural expressions and intellectual property is maintained with integrity as belonging to the Indigenous architect who has created it – driven by a strong desire and need to serve and meet the needs of the Indigenous community for whom it has been created.

The funding client's recognition of the significance of commissioning an Indigenous architect to lead this process, along with the collaborating support of the broader team, has resulted in a highly successful project that maintains the identity and ownership of how Indigenous thinking, knowledge, and stories are expressed in contemporary architecture with a leading contemporary Indigenous architect.

Ensuring leading Indigenous designers and professionals are at the forefront of significant community projects is integral to ensuring that Indigenous people's rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their intangible heritage is upheld and respected.

“... the making of architecture has become ever so much more complicated with the industrialised division of what once were the central roles of the architect. Many consultants contribute to the design and many contractors build the building. In this setting, it is perhaps an act of self preservation to sit in behind the loudest voices at the table. However, architects of Indigenous heritage must lead the architectural strategy and direction. Sitting in behind other commercial practices leading projects is akin to waiting on a table for scraps; or even worse, waiting outside the tent. In short, to enter the contest, we must stand and speak. And write.”
Recognising the contribution of Aboriginal people and culture
Kevin O’Brien is a descendent of the Kaurereg and Meriam peoples of the Torres Strait Islands in far north Queensland. While not specifically local to the area, being able to draw on the cultural heritage, knowledge, and experience of his own background enabled O’Brien to apply an understanding of social behaviours and protocols that are not otherwise evident or explicit.

Through the body of his work, and the increased publication and acknowledgement of his voice as an important contemporary Australian architect, a recognition of the contribution of Aboriginal people and culture in contemporary Australian society and culture will be recognised.

Kevin O’Brien Architects
Kevin O’Brien is a practicing architect in Brisbane. He graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture in 1995 and a Master of Philosophy (Architecture) in 2006 from the University of Queensland. Having merged his practice, he is currently a leading principal of BVN Architects (Brisbane), as well as a Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Sydney. He was previously Professor of Design at the Queensland University of Technology from 2013–15.

The Casino Aboriginal Medical Service building has been a significant project in the growing body of work by Kevin O’Brien Architects. Beyond community buildings and facilities, O’Brien’s creative practice has included theatre design, exhibition design, and public art collaborations across the world including works in Los Angeles, Dublin, and Venice. Through these works of cross-platform collaborations he has extended his idea of “Finding Country”.

Other projects by Kevin O’Brien Architects:
- Blak Box Pavilion for Urban Theatre Projects, Barangaroo Reserve (June 2018), Blacktown Showground (January – February 2019)

Cape York Partnership Offices (2016 Australian Institute of Architects, National Commendation for Commercial Architecture; 2016 Australian Institute of Architects, Qld Chapter, State Award for Commercial Architecture; 2016 Australian Institute of Architects, Qld Chapter, State Commendation for Sustainable Architecture; 2016 Australian Institute of Architects, Qld Chapter, Far North Queensland Regional Commendation; 2016 Australian Institute of Architects, Qld Chapter, Eddie Oribin Award for Building of the Year)

General Learning, Wellers Hill State School (2015 Australian Institute of Architects, Qld Chapter, Brisbane Regional Commendation for Educational Architecture)

Administration and Library, Woorabinda State School (2015 Australian Institute of Architects, Qld Chapter, State Commendation for Educational Architecture; 2013 Australian Institute of Architects, Qld Chapter, Central Queensland Regional Commendation)


Lessons learnt
This project grew from a deep understanding of both staff and community needs and experiences. Taking the time to get to know members of the community and staff, and build their trust, has resulted in a highly nuanced and sophisticated design that responds not only to a specific community but also more broadly to the experiences of many Indigenous communities in Australia.

While the level of detail and refinement of Kevin O’Brien’s design documents for the project were lost to some extent in the process of translation to construction documentation, the high-level design ambitions were carried through as robust design principles that have provided a highly successful result for all.
Recognising living culture: The Koorie Heritage Trust encourages people to see, touch, and discuss items from its collection, and enjoy an interactive experience of learning and sharing knowledge. Image: Peter Bennetts.

Supporting a living culture by designing a place of interaction and exchange

QUICK FACTS

**PROJECT TYPE:** Interior design

**LOCATION:** Federation Square, Melbourne, Victoria

**COUNTRY:** Woiwourring/Boon Wurrung (Kulin Nation)

**CLIENT:** Koorie Heritage Trust Inc.

**PROJECT SCALE:** 950 m² (over 3 levels)

**PROJECT COST:** 2.1 million

**YEAR:** Completed 2015

**PROJECT TEAM:**

- **INTERIOR DESIGN**
  Greenaway Architects in collaboration with Lyons Architecture and Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV)

- **OTHER CONSULTANTS**
  Builder – Kane Constructions
  Services Engineering – Waterman
  Structure – Hyder Consulting
  Joinery – Michael Earl, Schiavello
  Quantity Surveyor – Wilde and Woollard

**PROCUREMENT PROCESS:** Select tender

**AWARDS:**

- 2016 Victorian Architecture Awards: Finalist, Melbourne Prize, Interior Architecture, and Small Project Architecture
- 2016 Good Design Awards: Finalist, Architectural Design – Interior Design
- 2016 Dulux Colour Awards: Commendation, Commercial Interior (Office Fitout and Retail)
The Koorie Heritage Trust provides educational programs and resources to promote, support, and celebrate the Aboriginal culture of south-east Australia. The Trust’s Melbourne premises showcase a large collection of Koorie art and cultural artefacts, housing galleries and exhibition space as well as administration workspaces and meeting areas.

The Trust is housed within the Yarra Building in Federation Square on Wurundjeri Country. The premises had been shifted from the Museum of Victoria on the city fringe to the centre of Melbourne, right next to the Yarra River. This shift in itself was a deeply symbolic act from both the organisation’s and the designers’ perspectives, in that it recognised a living and vibrant culture. The design, in turn, responds to this lively city context.

“Indigenous people have demonstrated unique abilities of adaption and resilience, from before first contact to the present day. Aboriginal organisations like the Trust have shifted to numerous locations over the years, but have always held firm in showcasing and celebrating culture regardless of where they were located. However, there is now a strong desire within Community to demonstrate a visible presence within our major cities.”
—Jefa Greenaway, “Cultural adaption and resilience in Federation Square”, Architecture Australia, 22 December 2017

The design of the new space is centred around displaying and celebrating Indigenous culture and heritage by enabling a wide audience of visitors to interact with the collection and enjoy the experience.

Working in collaboration
The interior fitout was designed by Wailwan and Kamilaroi descendant Jefa Greenaway in collaboration with community engagement consultant and Gunditjmara descendant Rueben Berg, with whom he founded Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV). The pair collaborated on the project with Melbourne firm Lyons Architecture.

This process of co-design and engagement recognises their voices as important contributors in contemporary Australian design.

As a collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members, it was possible to overlay multiple perspectives to be able to understand how the design might best respond to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors and users alike. This diverse and collaborative approach has enabled a project with a strong connection to its context and the creation of a place that fosters education, communication, and celebration of a living culture.

Nurturing a duty of care:
Birrarung – River of Mist (the Yarra) is referenced throughout with views out and sightlines directed towards the river; colours, patterns, and shapes re-occur, consistently referencing the water narrative as a key feature of the design. Image: Peter Bennets.

“By engaging with Indigenous voices, one can limit the unavoidable cultural faux pas or the fear of ‘walking on cultural egg shells’ shifting to a productive and informed approach which embeds inclusivity while embracing diverse perspectives.”
Identifying three important design principles
Through the process of co-design, Greenaway and Berg identified three key ideas they felt were most important to this project:
—connection to Country – specifically to the Birrarung (Yarra River)
—access to the Trust’s collection (which includes over 60,000 items)
—maximising opportunities for community engagement and exchange.

These three principles governed all design decisions throughout the project development and ensured that the views, ambitions, and key values of the Aboriginal community were recognised in the resulting project.

Through this project, IADV sought to establish a methodology of incorporating Indigenous ideas, and to embed these both within the design process and approach as well as in the physical result.

Celebrating a living culture
The ambition of both the client and the designers was to reinforce an understanding that Koorie culture is a living culture. The Trust has established a place that is engaged with its central city context and expresses a vibrancy and audacity that promotes and supports discussions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The recognition of living Indigenous culture is a foundation of the Koorie Heritage Trust and this foundation is recognised not only through the work and activities of the organisation, but also through the design and engagement of Jefa Greenaway and Rueben Berg in a collaborative design process with Lyons Architecture.

“Indigenous culture is a living culture. This is a living organism of which you become part of that experience. You have the opportunity for engagement in a meaningful way with the Trust.”

Re-establishing a relationship with the river
One of the main drivers of the design was to ameliorate the issue that the building had turned its back on Birrarung (the Wurundjeri name for the Yarra River). As a result, the water narrative became particularly important as a way to re-establish and recognise the significance of the river and open up a conversation about what the river means to the local Aboriginal community.

An example of this can be seen in the communal lounge area – where two windows were reinstated to take advantage of the views over the public domain and out onto the river. This established an important social place where staff and community Elders can meet and engage in conversation.

“Given that the building is adjacent to Birrarung (the Yarra River), that was a key reference point. That was pivotal for me finding a means – to connect to that cultural continuity of the river being the lifeblood of a community. And being [in] close proximity to cultural sites, like the MCG, just up the road, which was a gathering place for the five Kulin Nations. This began to create a narrative where we could connect to where we were, and therefore we could acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the site is located.”

In addition to inserting windows that open up glimpses of the river from the interior, patterns of light on the ceiling and in the floor finish direct attention towards Birrarung. The blues throughout and grey-pebbled concrete floors also continually reference the river as you move through and experience the spaces. Referencing the cultural and topographic features of Birrarung is a key feature and narrative of the design.

Recognising living culture:
With access shared equally by the staff and public, the joinery elements become “positive dividers” that delineate private and public spaces, yet maintain transparency. The collection is interwoven into the general experience of the space. Image: Peter Bennetts.
Bringing the collection to life
Another foundation principle of the Koorie Heritage Trust is to facilitate access to cultural heritage material for the Indigenous community. Despite the Trust’s previous premises being almost three times larger, an ingenious method of turning internal “walls” into display cases has enabled 20 times more of the Trust’s collection to be displayed.

Rather than constructing solid partitions or wall systems, a series of joinery elements have been designed as stand-alone items, beautifully crafted and with a dual purpose. They define the spaces, but also provide a publicly accessible resource that encourages people to see, touch, and experience items from the Trust’s collection.

Endeavouring to break down walls, both metaphorically and physically, the display cases reveal the inner workings of a cultural facility – where staff, as custodians of the collection, are enveloped by the collection they are protecting. With access shared equally by the staff and the public, the joinery elements become “positive dividers” that delineate private and public spaces, yet maintain transparency. In this way, the collection is interwoven into the general experience of the space, moving away from a conventional museum-like approach of static displays.

“It is a hub for activity and engagement. It encourages you to open drawers, look through things through the top of the table, which has glass on it, and see artefacts within the table. The drawers all have artefacts from the collection. They are set at different levels so that from kids to adults, all can interact with the materials close at hand. It has a cantilever on one end, which allows people with wheelchairs to come in. We can have weaving workshops, where people sit around and use it. It could be used for art demonstrations.”

Sparking engagement and exchange
A seven-metre long “canoe” table is a feature of the design and provides a focal point for visitors. It is a signifier of community engagement and exchange. While its form evokes a traditional bark canoe, its expression, detailing, and construction use contemporary joinery techniques. The element references the scar tree that was an important community feature of the Trust’s previous premises. Scar trees represent Indigenous custodianship of the land – based on a key understanding of only taking what was necessary (for the creation of bark canoes, shelters, shields, or containers) and allowing the tree to continue living.

The design provides spaces for both formal and informal engagement. Flexible workshop rooms accommodate large groups of school children, or divide to create smaller meeting rooms, while seating areas at the entry and next to a shared staff and visitor kitchenette provide opportunities for conversation and social encounters as well as places for quiet reflection.

“The project built over three levels required the ability to pull people up vertically through the building from a plaza level on the ground floor through an intermediate floor not part of the client’s tenancy to the uppermost level. A carefully calibrated engagement strategy, along with a considered level of cultural advocacy and design input, resulted in a design which referenced riverbanks, water and washed river pebbles. Contemporary references to carved trees, shield patterns, traditional canoes, and Indigenous astronomy in ceiling lights sought to evoke a sensory engagement with place and story.”

Designing from an Indigenous perspective
When they started the project, Lyons Architecture saw a beautiful space off Federation Square. Greenaway and Berg saw a place that had turned its back to the most significant element of the city – the river – and all of its cultural significance and heritage.

With the support and experience of Lyons, Greenaway and Berg were able to lead and drive the design process from an Indigenous perspective, remaining involved throughout the project. Through this they have identified what is important to them as Indigenous designers and practitioners, and what they believe is important for their community.

“As founders of Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV), Berg and Greenaway believe design can promote cultural understanding, if not reconciliation.

“It’s a powerful connection for [non-Aboriginal] people to be able to think ‘I’m living on a place where other people lived for tens of thousands of years,’ says Berg. ‘So they don’t see [Aboriginal] culture as some other thing. We’re just all a continuation of that [history], because we’re living on this place.

There are many ways to engage with Aboriginal cultural values … from obvious methods of incorporating motifs to more subtle techniques of planning shared spaces instead of separate rooms.”
“The project showcased culture in a manner which became accessible, visible, and celebratory. It reinforced the importance of connections to the landscape, the value of conversation within a cultural space while encouraging the normalisation of Indigenous perspectives in the conception of a design solution. The use of Indigenous knowledge acted as a conduit between the Indigenous-led cultural organisation and the design team, while utilising the transferrable skills of Indigenous design thinking and education to provide a highly evolved layer of cultural meaning into the project.”

Acknowledging and supporting the contribution of Indigenous designers
Collaborating on this project, Greenaway and Berg have established a more prominent voice for Aboriginal designers and other professionals working on built environment projects. The project has been acknowledged in design and architecture awards, published in journals, and featured widely in both industry and mainstream media.

In addition, Greenaway and Berg have established the design advocacy organisation Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV), a not-for-profit network of design practitioners, graduates, and students.

The two main aims of IADV are:
— to encourage the Indigenous community to be more engaged in architecture and design in the built environment
— to encourage architects and designers to be more engaged with Indigenous culture.

Since completing this project, Greenaway Architects has undertaken other community-related projects including Ngarara Place for RMIT University in Melbourne in collaboration with Indigenous landscape designer Charles Solomon and artist Aroha Groves.

Through enabling and supporting the work of emerging Indigenous designers, a diversity of Indigenous voices within contemporary Australian architecture is acknowledged. Recognising and supporting the contributions of Aboriginal people and culture to contemporary Australian society can help to form a more balanced perspective, and contribute to a process of recalibration by educating the broader population about Indigenous history, knowledge, and living culture.

“Where Indigenous agency is facilitated, empowerment and emancipation soon follows. Indigenous practitioners and academics are fast developing and consolidating their skills, knowledge and confidence here in Australia, as they begin to shape the conversation while being actively sought out to contribute to projects, policy and knowledge exchange ...

... international exchange among First Nations practitioners provides real potential for learning, benchmarking and collaboration.

The result of such engagement is revealing parallel work around Indigenous-determined protocols, processes and frameworks which seek to guide or codify a methodology that considers Indigenous culture among designers, consumers of design, as well as a focus on the representation of culture in appropriate rather than ‘appropriating’ ways. Such work is endeavouring to safeguard the integrity of cultural considerations, while empowering practitioners (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) to implement strategies that are mindful and respectful of Indigenous knowledge and cultural expression.”
“The process of cultural exchange has many layers; it requires a process of listening – deep listening, it requires patience and generosity of spirit, which Indigenous people have in abundance, and it requires an acute attention to protocols and processes that places acknowledgement, authorisation and input from Elders at its centre.

Consequently, such important roles act as a cultural bridge or design diplomacy to ensure that we move to a space that moves beyond the simplistic or tokenistic, towards a considered approach that captures the rich affinities that reside in Indigenous culture.

The value of this manifesto of Indigenous awakening, within the architectural and design disciplines is to embrace Indigenous design thinking as both aspirational and valuable to all. The advantages are threefold; it enables indigenous-led approaches, it facilitates First Nations collaborations, and communicates the values of such thinking predicated on defined systems or protocols to enable best practice.”


Lessons learnt

There was a shared ambition to create a design that expresses a strong connection to place, and recognises and celebrates Koorie culture as a living and dynamic culture in dialogue with the city. This approach draws on stories and cultural practices local to the area to provide a rationale across all aspects of the design from planning and functional relationships of spaces through to materials, textures, colours, and details. As a result, a lively and joyful place has been created that celebrates the diversity of Koorie culture and feels welcoming and accessible to both the Indigenous community and to the general public.

The fitout has been warmly embraced by the community. Visitor numbers have increased dramatically, and the spaces are consistently hired out and are well-patronised. The project has successfully provided a place that is welcoming and highly valued by the community.

Further resources


MORE INFORMATION

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Recognising living culture: The collaborative, temporal, and interactive nature of this project and its associated events was a celebration of resilience, as well as an acknowledgement of loss. Image: Peter Greig.

Celebrating a continuing living culture through collaboration on a temporary public artwork

QUICK FACTS

| PROJECT TYPE: | Public art project |
| LOCATION: | Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney |
| COUNTRY: | Gadigal |
| CLIENT: | Kaldor Public Art Projects |
| PROJECT SCALE: | Large-scale art project: 20,000 m² |
| PROJECT COST: | $2.1 million; funded through local, State, and Federal Government grants and corporate, philanthropic, and private supporters; support also included services and material contributions in kind |
| YEAR: | 17 September to 3 October 2016 |

PROJECT TEAM:

ARTIST: Jonathon Jones
ABORIGINAL ADVISORY BOARD
Dr Christine Evans, Jason Glanville, Prof. Michael McDaniel, Uncle Charles Madden, Hetti Perkins
KALDOR PROJECT TEAM John Kaldor AO, Director; Bettina Kaldor, General Manager; Sophie Forbat, Artistic Program Manager; Sue Saxon, Education and Public Programs Manager; Emma Pike, Curator; Antonia Fredman, Education and Public Programs Coordinator; Melissa Rice / Margot War, Executive Assistants to John Kaldor; Louise Merhi, Finance Officer; Robin Stern, IT Consultant; Monique Watkins, Curatorial and Communications Assistant; Ineke Dane, Archivist and Research Assistant
SPECIAL PROJECT COORDINATION Relle Mott

LOGISTICS Peter Lawrence
CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE Emily McDaniel
MARKETING Allison Tyra
INVIGILATOR AND VOLUNTEER COORDINATION Sophie Kitson
VENUE MANAGEMENT Ruth Friedmann, Victoria Johnstone
INSTALLATION AND PRODUCTION Genevieve O’Callaghan, Peter Lawrence, Luke Horton
GYPSUM SHIELDS DCG
Design, Scott Crowe, Shadowmaker Studio, Roger Mitchell, Cineart Studios, Carol Cooper
NATIVE MEADOW Landsdowne, Peter Cunne (Australian Botanic Garden), Ralph Walley (University of New England), Ian Chivers (Native Seeds), Faini’s Farms, Hortus Technical Services
SOUNDSCAPE Sonar Sound
CATALOGUE Mark Gowing, Elliott Bryce Foulkes
**barrangal dyara (skin and bones)** was a large-scale public artwork by contemporary artist Jonathan Jones. It was installed in the Royal Botanic Garden in Sydney over a period of two and a half weeks in September and October 2016. The project was the result of a collaborative effort involving a large group of contributors. It was highly symbolic in its recognition of Indigenous perspectives of Australian history.

Jonathan Jones, a member of the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi nations of south-east Australia, was commissioned to create the artwork by Kaldor Public Art Projects in 2014 after submitting his idea to an initiative called Your Very Good Idea – an open call-out to Australian artists for public art ideas.

The project occupied roughly 20,000 m² in the Royal Botanic Garden and incorporated 15,000 white gypsum shields and a native kangaroo grassland (Themeda triandra species). It also included a soundscape of Indigenous languages and a program of workshops, talks, and events that were held over the course of the project at the site and at other public institutions in Sydney.

The project presented Indigenous place making as a temporal approach that highlights living cultural knowledge and practices. It offered an opportunity to consider both the tangible and intangible aspects of a project, the built and the living, and acknowledged these as having an equally important and powerful role in identifying and celebrating a living culture and community.

**Revealing many layers and stories** *barrangal dyara* means “skin and bones” in the local Sydney Gadigal language. The title of the project reflects the malnourished version of Australian history taught today, where few people (both in Australia and internationally) are aware of Aboriginal history and, in particular, most lack an Aboriginal perspective of history.

Few people also are aware of the existence of the Garden Palace that once stood in the Royal Botanic Garden in Sydney. In 1882 the Garden Palace burnt to the ground in suspicious circumstances, razing convict records, government archives, as well as thousands of Indigenous objects and ancestral remains. Some years ago, while researching his family history, Jones discovered nearly all his nation’s artefacts had been lost in the flames. The name of the work also refers to its ambition to honour the ancestral remains of those who never received a proper burial.

Jones notes that “the frontier was a really violent place. That Aboriginal objects were stolen.” For Jones, the work is also about “peeling the layers of skin back off this site and revealing these bones in the landscape”.

“The project was Jones’s response to the immense loss felt throughout Australia due to the destruction of these culturally significant items. It represented an effort to commence a healing process and a celebration of the survival of the world’s oldest living culture despite this traumatic event.”

Marking the site with gypsum shields
The artwork consisted of thousands of bleached white shields, made specially for the project, marking out the extensive 250 m by 150 m footprint where the palace originally stood. The shields were made from gypsum, often used in south-east Aboriginal mourning ceremonies. They were based on four typical designs from Aboriginal nations of the south-east. Records of historical engravings depict the use of shields for ceremony rather than exclusively for warfare purposes. However, the shields for the artwork were devoid of any unique markings, symbolising the erasure of cultural complexities when Aboriginal artefacts were destroyed in the Garden Palace fire.

Scattered on the ground like the rubble and ash that was left after the fire, they evoked a sense of loss and mourning. This reference to fire had a dual purpose – referring not only to the fire that destroyed the palace and the countless Aboriginal artefacts stored there, but also symbolising regeneration.

Planting a native grassland
At the centre of the installation, native kangaroo grass was planted over the Pioneer Memorial Garden, a formal garden of sandstone paths that marks the location where the Garden Palace’s great dome once stood. The grassland is a reference to Aboriginal agriculture where native grasslands are maintained through burning – where fire is a way of regenerating life.

This is a quietly defiant act, picturesque in its quality, but deeply symbolic as a rebuttal to the commonly believed myth that Indigenous people were agriculturally unsophisticated before Europeans arrived. Here, Jones draws attention to the fact that the early settlers recorded in their diaries evidence of Aboriginal populations cultivating vast areas of land; constructing irrigation systems and traps; and harvesting, storing, and milling grain crops – as documented in Dark Emu, Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident? (Bruce Pascoe 2014), The Biggest Estate On Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia (Bill Gammage 2011), and Australia and the Origins of Agriculture (Rupert Gerritson 2008).

The grassland was enlivened by an eight-channel soundtrack of eight Aboriginal languages. To prepare for the artwork, Jones sought the assistance of the community to resurrect and use Indigenous languages, some of which had been forbidden, others lost. The soundtrack included the Sydney Language, Gamilaraay, Gumbaynggirr, Gunditjmara, Ngarrindjeri, Paakantji, Wiradjuri, and Woiwurrung languages.
Presenting a program of associated events

In conjunction with the artwork was a series of performances, talks, and workshops; a historic photography exhibition; a publication about the project and history of the site; and a series of educational symposiums about Indigenous language, knowledge, and culture. This diverse program brought together several leading public and educational institutions as collaborators on the project including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the State Library of New South Wales, the Australian Museum, the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney Living Museums, the University of Sydney, the University of Technology Sydney, and the University of New South Wales.

The documentation of the process and events associated with the project were an important part of the work. This included photography and video recordings of the work and events; a book about the project that records the process; research and academic writings relating to the work; and a series of videos and audio recordings that remain accessible on the Kaldor Public Art Projects website.

“The programmed events, including the active invigilators who were guides for the work, were the most important part of the project. Having thousands of people on Gadigal Country, hearing stories of that place, under the trees, was really the heart and soul of the project.

Non-Aboriginal Australians more and more want meaningful connections with Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal people, to our credit, have never stopped trying to put out our hand in friendship. This project enabled that to happen.

There are too many programs to name and too many favourites, but one that stands out in my memory was on the last day when Uncle Bruce Pascoe talked to hundreds of eager audience members about Aboriginal agriculture. For this talk to happen in the Botanical Garden, a space filled with exotic plants, on the site of the Garden Palace which was central to the colonial construction of the Australian identity, with a meadow of kangaroo grass in the background, was very special. This was the strength of the project, bringing together things to tell the truth about our Country.”

—Jonathan Jones

Connecting with Country / Case studies

 Updating recorded history:
The grassland, a species regenerated by fire, symbolised the sophisticated systems of agriculture that existed in Australia before Europeans arrived. Image: Anna Kucera.
Recognising living culture:
The gypsum shields were contemporary, temporal artefacts, evoking loss, but also symbolising the artist’s and collaborators’ ongoing, living connection with history and place. Image: Anna Kucera.

“I had really strong ideas on what the project should achieve, and managing all the relationships (collaborations) is something I could have achieved only with the support of Kaldor Public Art Projects ...

Working with the level and number of Aboriginal community members was unprecedented for me and was something achieved only with some key cultural relationships. Having Dr Uncle Stan Grant back the project meant a lot. I lent on old relationships and made some new ones, all of whom, thankfully, trusted me and gifted their language and cultural knowledge to the project. Once community got to hear about the story of the Garden Palace, they were very supportive.”
—Jonathan Jones

Prompting us to think about memory, through temporality
“The project was designed to make us think about memory: how we remember, what we remember, and why we remember. So the project being temporal was an essential element. The project’s memory has been created and sustained by all the conversations that it developed. This included the three symposiums conducted in the lead-up to the project at key cultural institutions with a relationship to the Garden Palace, the talks that occurred every day at the project, Bangarra’s special performance, the daily artists’ talks, etc. These all created a new memory that can be carried on by the community in ways that a permanent artwork couldn’t achieve.”
—Jonathan Jones

After the period of installation in the Royal Botanic Garden, half of the shields were gifted to the Art Gallery of NSW (currently in storage) and the other half (which were more damaged or worn) were processed through a gypsum recycler. The kangaroo grasses were donated to the Botanic Garden and were planted in areas within the gardens and the Domain.
Connecting with Country / Case studies

Recognising living culture
Representing such a broad cross-section of the Aboriginal community in a highly public and well-publicised forum created an opportunity to educate the broader public on the perspectives, views, history, knowledge, and living culture of Aboriginal people in Australia.

The project has created a greater awareness of the richness and tragic history of loss and destruction of Aboriginal culture that has been experienced. It has forged bonds and built greater understanding – through the process of working together for those directly involved in the project – and provided opportunities for the broader public to connect and better understand the perspectives of Aboriginal people in our Country.

Building greater awareness of contemporary Aboriginal artists
Jonathan Jones's selection, through an open ideas competition run by an internationally renowned and recognised public art organisation, has contributed to his recognition, nationally and internationally, as a significant contemporary Australian artist.

The project also supported and promoted other Aboriginal designers, professionals, researchers, craftspeople, and artists through the diverse platforms and outputs created as a part of the work including the publication, videos, and lecture series. This approach has enabled a broad and ongoing reach for the promotion and dissemination of Aboriginal knowledge, skills, perspectives, and voices.

Lessons learnt
This project has presented a new way of considering Indigenous place making – beyond just a singular physical manifestation. The project's diverse program of public events engaged on multiple levels with a broad range of ages. It's successful process of collaboration demonstrated a multidisciplinary and multifaceted approach to art practice and cultural output. This approach also illustrates how the other aspects of a work – that document the process, research, and events around it – can provide an ongoing resource and source of inspiration for others.

Jones's work grew initially from a deeply personal experience of researching his own Aboriginal ancestry, and the immense sense of loss he felt in discovering that virtually all of his nation's artefacts had been completely destroyed in the Garden Palace fire.

Contributors

LANGUAGE SOUNDSCAPE
Collaborators for the Language Soundscape included: families who speak the Sydney Languages; Gamilaraay and Gumbaynggirr: Joel Wright, Vicki Couzens, and the Victorian Aboriginal Commission.
For Wiradjuri: Dr Uncle Stan Grant Senior AM, Geoff Andersons, Lionel Lovett, Donna Payne, Skye Harris, Lyretta Gilby, Ron Wardrop and the children of Parkes Public School, Parkes East Public School, Middleton Public School, Parkes High School, and Holy Family Primary School (Kieran Baker, Lara Bennett, Kade Crist, Levi Edwards, Nicayden Greenwood, Caitlin Hertt, Rebecca Kearney, Bayden Maran, Chelsea McGarrity, Ellynia Redfern, Trudy Richardson, Michael Riley, Samantha Riley, Kyah Turnbull, Ella Ward).
For Woiwurrung: Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin. Community elders and knowledge-holders also contributed to the catalogue, symposia (and fires), lunchtime talks, panel discussions (UTS and UNSW), and artist demonstrations:
Oliver Costello, Dr Peter Cuneo, Aunty Julie Freeman, Prof. Ross Gibson, Dr Uncle Stan Grant Senior AM, Dr Peter Kohane, Dr Jeanine Leane, Prof. Michael McDaniel, Kimberley Moulton, Bruce Pascoe, Emma Pike, Dr Ilaria Vanni Accarigi; Clint Bracknell, Russell Smith, Dr Uncle Stan Grant Senior AM, Dr Christine Evans, Kirsten Thorpe, Ronald Briggs, Aunty Julie Freeman, Bruce Pascoe, Kim Mahood, Gary Warner; Michael Brand, Dr Peter Kohane, Dr Linda Young, Steven Miller, Wesley Enoch, Ilaria Vanni, Cara Pinchbeck, Clothilde Bullen; Uncle Charles Madden, Uncle Allen Madden, Kim McKay, Laura McBride, Tasha Lamb, Assoc. Prof. Grace Karskens, Ann Toy, Thelma Thomas-Lesianawai, Stiff Gins (Kaleena Briggs and Nardi Simpson), Hetti Perkins, Stephen Gilchrist; Lorraine Connelly-Northey, Peter Cuneo, Jeremy Steele, Paul Irish, Robynne Quiggin, Keith Smith, Michael Jarrett, Aaron Ellis, Peter McKenzie, Catherine De Lorenzo, Carol Cooper, Jacqui Newline, Tim Low; Alison Whittaker, Jason De Santolo, Prof. Larissa Behrendt; Keith Munro, Shari Lett, Brenda L Croft, Lucy Simpson; Greg Simms, Eme Timbery, Marilyn Russell, Julie, Aunty Joyce, Pam, Sue, Lorraine Tye.
Indigenous invigilators for this project were recruited with the assistance of Solid Ground, an initiative established by Carriageworks and Blacktown Arts Centre to provide education, training, and employment.

MORE INFORMATION

**GANSW policies:**
Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW

**GANSW guides:**
Implementing Good Design: Implementing Better Placed design process into projects
Evaluating Good Design: Implementing Better Placed design objectives into projects

**GANSW projects:**
Designing with Country

**GANSW advisory notes:**
Collaboration
Strategic visioning
Implementation plans
CASE STUDY

KAMAY BOTANY BAY NATIONAL PARK, FINAL MASTER PLAN, KURNELL

Recognising living culture:
A loop pathway through the park – this section raised to create a platform under an elongated open roof – is woven into the landscape, offering views and experiences that acknowledge the site’s significant past, present, and future.


Creating a place of significance for all Australians

QUICK FACTS

PROJECT TYPE:
Precinct master plan

LOCATION:
Kurnell NSW

COUNTRY:
Tharawal

CLIENT:
Office of Environment and Heritage NSW

PROJECT SCALE:
Precinct wide

PROJECT COST:
$50 million (Stage 1)

YEAR:
The draft master plan was presented for public exhibition in 2018. Public consultation on the draft plan closed in August 2018. The masterplan was finalised in February 2019 and is yet to be implemented.

PROJECT TEAM:

ARCHITECTURE
Neeson Murcutt Architects Pty Ltd

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
Sue Barnsley Design

INTERPRETATION
Freeman Ryan Design

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Context

PROCUREMENT PROCESS:
Direct engagement of design consultants by Office of Environment and Heritage, with funding from the NSW Government and Australian Government.

Recognising living culture:
A loop pathway through the park – this section raised to create a platform under an elongated open roof – is woven into the landscape, offering views and experiences that acknowledge the site’s significant past, present, and future.

Kurnell is a highly significant site for many people – the place of first contact on the east coast of Australia between First Nations people and the crew of the *Endeavour* in 1770. Yet, its physical experience is underwhelming and disproportionate to this significance.

Driven by the upcoming 250th anniversary of Cook’s landing in April 2020, the Kamay Botany Bay National Park Draft Master Plan, commissioned by the Office of Environment and Heritage, positions this place as a destination of local, national, and global significance.

The projects proposed in the master plan aim to provide a balanced view that recognises Aboriginal stories and perspectives equally alongside European historical accounts. The foundation of the master plan is respect for all cultures and heritage, for landscape and the natural environment, and for time past, present, and future. It aims to rebalance the perspectives and recognition of Indigenous stories that are currently significantly underplayed and poorly acknowledged in comparison to the dominant European narrative.

The plan also seeks to support a healing process, to acknowledge past actions and wrongdoings, bridge cultures, regenerate the landscape, and provide a platform for the many stories and voices that have an enduring connection with this site, and which have been, until now, either disregarded, underplayed, or ignored.

Reappraising and renewing a significant site
The final master plan sets out three stages of work that can be implemented as funding becomes available:

**Stage 1** proposes an intensified visitor experience via an 850-metre loop path that encircles an existing Indigenous landscape and Barrawang Walk. This path connects significant elements – landscape, foreshore, stream, midden, monument walk, and an existing heritage building, Alpha House. The pathway broadens on the ridge behind Alpha House where it is sheltered by an elongated roof. The roof, of bark, spans open gathering places between three concrete and glass pavilions – one for exhibition and administration, one for education, one for a café. This replaces the existing visitor centre. Muted in colour, predominantly open, and low to the landscape, the generous scale of the bark roof is appropriate for a significant cultural destination. It will need to accommodate large numbers of visitors, including events.

An educational “collection” garden is proposed for the location of the existing visitor centre. The garden will present, overlayed as appropriate with Indigenous knowledge, the 132 plant species collected by botanists Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander when they visited Botany Bay on the *Endeavour* in 1770. The adjoining picnic area at Commemoration Flat will be upgraded with improved amenities and picnic facilities.

Nurturing a duty of care:
The new facilities and experiences are connected and embedded within the park landscape, using the footprint of existing development. Environmental restoration and revegetation will sustain the natural ecology of the site. Image: Kamay Botany Bay National Park Final Master Plan 2018, Neeson Murcutt Architects.
Critically, Stage 1 includes rebuilding the wharves and reintroducing the ferry service between the headlands at La Perouse and Kurnell. This will facilitate access to Country for community, provide an opportunity for visitors to arrive via water using public transport, and connect the two headland parks that mark the entrance to Botany Bay.

Stage 2 proposes redesigning the vehicular entry to create a sense of welcome and arrival through a restored Indigenous landscape. Beach Park will be formalised with amenities and access to water.

Stage 3 proposes upgrading the broader park including Yena, Cape Solander, and the network of existing walking tracks and trails, including new camping areas for walkers and culture camps, amenities, car and bike parking facilities, whale-watching lookouts and interpretation opportunities.

The design seamlessly integrates interpretation of the site. This is achieved through careful material selection, the collection garden, interpreted walks (with apps developed and delivered via BYO devices), a dedicated exhibition space, all embedded within the landscape and allowing broad scope for later including further stories and opportunities for interpretation.

Working with the community from the outset
The Office of Environment and Heritage commissioned a community engagement specialist to work with the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) on a community and stakeholder engagement program for the master plan project.

A community reference panel was established before starting the master plan project to provide input into the project brief, the site analysis, and the overall master plan design. The community reference panel included Aboriginal community members, representatives from the offices of State and Federal members of parliament, local government, and community interest groups. In addition, a design review panel was established by Government Architect NSW (GANSW) to ensure the highest standards of design will be carried through from master planning to design development, delivery, and completion.

A broad range of feedback was obtained via stakeholder workshops and meetings with the design review panel and community reference panel, and project management meetings, genuinely shaping the design of the draft master plan. A range of different meeting styles allowed different groups to provide input, including a community day at Kurnell led by NPWS and Context, which was a successful way of building support and involving the community in the project from early on.

Supporting connection with Country
The master plan, developed in consultation with the local Aboriginal community together with NPWS, is an important step in ensuring Aboriginal people have a clear say in how the park will be managed. The plan supports local Aboriginal community access to Country to maintain, renew, and develop cultural connections and practices.

The plan recognises the particular significance of this place to Aboriginal people and acknowledges and respects the view that a more balanced narrative of Australian history is long overdue. This is an opportunity for the nation to formally recognise past wrongs and aim to create a more balanced future.

In addition to this balanced narrative, the plan aims to create further opportunities for NPWS and the local Aboriginal community to work together on the protection, management, conservation, and interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage of Kamay Botany Bay National Park.

The master plan aims to create new opportunities for Aboriginal organisations and businesses in regard to tourism, landscape management, hospitality, and education. Aboriginal designers, professionals, craftspeople, and artists will play a key part in the detailed design and delivery of the park’s new facilities, programs, and resources, including the new exhibition space in the visitor building.

“The community open day at Kamay was a successful way of building support and involving the community in the project from early on in the process. Community and government feedback has been positive for the renewal of the park and support for rebalanced storytelling of how the contact story is told in this highly significant place. The master plan was fully endorsed by the community reference panel.”

—Rachel Neeson, architect, and Sue Barnsley, landscape architect
Expressing the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people

The ideas presented in the draft master plan give primary importance to balancing European interpretations of history with Indigenous perspectives, stories, and values:

Respect The foundation of the master plan is respect for all cultures and heritage, for landscape and the natural environment, and to make evident time past, present, and future. A key aspect of this approach is to adopt a small footprint by building within already disturbed areas and regenerating land where possible and appropriate.

Reflect Entry to the site considers a journey of arrival, either by sea or land – “creating a sense of threshold and space for reflection”. Ferry wharves are proposed to be reconstructed at La Perouse and Kurnell and upgraded vehicular entries to the park that re-establish areas of native vegetation providing a greater sense of arrival.

Rebalance The project prioritises a sense of inclusiveness for all, with the particular ambition to rebalance the perspectives and recognition of Indigenous stories that are currently significantly underplayed and under-acknowledged in comparison to the dominant European narrative. It also aims to provide a greater level of accessibility and consideration for people of all levels of ability, age groups, and backgrounds.

Heal A healing process is also sought to acknowledge past actions, bridge cultures, regenerate the landscape, create connections, and give voices to those who deserve to be heard.

Amplify The master plan seeks to amplify the unique character of this place through new works and interventions that allow for a more compelling storytelling and understanding of place. It recognises the significant history of the site from tens of thousands of years prior, up to the point of contact between Indigenous and Europeans, the stories since this time, and the stories ongoing. It seeks to amplify the various precincts within the park to give each its own sense of presence, identity, and purpose.

Enliven The plan seeks to reinforce the park as a meeting place, with new facilities and programmed events that support and draw attention to the significance of the site. The new visitor building is envisaged as a statement of identity, both quiet in the landscape and powerful in its materiality and form.

Sustain A program of restoration and revegetation is proposed to sustain the natural ecology of the site. A new visitor building with a collection garden, and the redevelopment of the existing heritage building, support a program that sustains culture, continuing Indigenous practices and promotes learning and education of these practices. The visitor building is highly integrated with the landscape and is seen as an adaptable building that can accommodate both indoor and outdoor programs and events of varying scales, thereby creating a financially sustainable asset for the community. These developments are also seen as providing employment opportunities for current and future generations including Indigenous employment.

—Neeson Murcutt Architects, Kamay Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell, Draft Master Plan 2017

With the rebuilding of the ferry wharves at Kurnell and La Perouse, the project will offer visitors the experience of arriving both by sea and by land, recreating a sense of what the experience might have been from dual perspectives. The ferry will link both sides of Kamay Botany Bay National Park – a connection between Kurnell and La Perouse headlands that will reinforce a sense of place for the local Aboriginal community and improve access to the site for local and international visitors.

Integrating with the natural landscape

The proposed design is based on using the existing footprints of already disturbed areas and includes a program of regeneration, working with the local Indigenous community to restore and celebrate the unique ecology of the site.

The visitor centre building is highly integrated with the landscape, providing flexible indoor and outdoor spaces for performances, education, and display that connect directly with Country. A large communal table is provided for community gatherings and picnics, and seating areas relating to the site and views provide places to pause and reflect. Key to the design is the visual connection to the La Perouse headland from the new Kurnell visitor building, and the relationship with Alpha House.

The pebble-finished concrete platform below the bark roof extends through the landscape, crossing the creek and connecting the picnic area of Commemoration Flat with Alpha House. Three independent glass and concrete pavilions beneath the roof canopy provide spaces for education, exhibition, and eating. The long verandah provides at once a walkway, shelter, and gathering places along its length. These spaces, and the broader interpretation strategy, provide multiple platforms for connecting both the local community and visitors with the site.

“We see this place as the most significant site in Australia, for the contact story and in the context of a contemporary nation. The contact story, a moment in time, casts focus on big issues looking back and projecting forward, of culture – indigenous, colonial, multicultural – and place – geology, ecology, use and management. Design cannot heal the impact of 250 years of occupation, but it can provide a platform for diverse cultures, readings, and dialogue.”

—Neeson Murcutt Architects, Kamay Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell, Final Master Plan 2018
Maintaining a strong vision

The project needs to retain the master plan’s strength of vision:

“Kamay stands alone in the catalogue of national parks across NSW because of its cultural significance. It is potentially a major visitor destination — a living park museum — not unlike Waitangi in New Zealand. The master plan ushers Kamay to this level – an important and inclusive public place at a national scale within a national park.

The master plan vision supports increased visitor capacity, community education and interpretation programs, and importantly a balanced storytelling that includes Indigenous and European history. The facilities and exhibition need to be world-class. Certainly, there is a growing appetite for Indigenous and local stories to be told. Tourism NSW will be able to support this trend. NPWS needs to elevate this site as a significant place for all Australians and a highly desirable destination that provides a cohesive visitor experience.”

—Rachel Neeson, architect, and Sue Barnsley, landscape architect

Holding tight to this vision will be challenging. The project needs champions and bipartisan support at a high level. NPWS needs to be supported by a strong project manager and a project control group who understand the complexity of the project and can safeguard the master plan vision, ensuring the highest quality in the selection of consultants and contractors.

Timing is critical and needs to be realistic to ensure a high-quality result. Delay in starting the next phase may undermine goodwill from the local Indigenous community. However, the time frame for completion need not be constrained by the 2020 anniversary. The program for documentation and construction needs to be realistic and robust. Importantly, it needs to allow for materials research, plant propagation, ongoing consultation, and archaeological finds.

Ensuring ongoing engagement with the community

The level and quality of ongoing engagement with local Indigenous groups will be critical to the success of the project.

The project is vulnerable to a diminished result if there is a lack of continuity in the relationships that have been built with the community. This should be followed through to ensure the community remains involved through all subsequent stages of documentation and construction.

The interpretation design and content development needs to allow sufficient time for further community consultation to ensure integrity. For a project of this scale, this phase may take a 12- to 24-month period. The process needs to include an agreed schedule of workshops and presentations of content and design – a combination of conversation, contribution, and response – as well as allowing time for the community to discuss and approve the details (stories, images, quotes, attributions).

Critical factors identified by the master plan project team include:

—maintaining ongoing and deep consultation with Indigenous groups – keeping communication open, listening to multiple voices, keeping promises
—attending to protocols with archaeological remains
—ensuring continuing community access to the site, and holding community open days
—ensuring Indigenous involvement in the design process for the site and exhibition, site construction, ongoing site administration and management.

The provision of the ferry service is fundamental and should be prioritised.

Influencing urban planning and the design of the built environment:

The park landscape will be more accessible, supporting the sense of place and connection with Country for the local community, and offering a more welcoming and informative experience. Image: Kamay Botany Bay National Park Final Master Plan 2018, Neeson Murcutt Architects.
Meeting the challenges
The greatest challenges include maintaining a consistent commitment at all levels, unilateral agreement on the intended outcomes, and managing the expectations of a diverse group of stakeholders.

To progress successfully from here, the project requires confirmation and commitment of funding, acknowledgement of the appropriate time required, clarity of approval processes, and clear definition of subsequent stages.

Continuity of design intent, carrying through from the master plan, will be a key element in meeting these challenges, as will managing the various reactions to the master plan’s inclusive vision for this significant site. Some may see it as contentious, while others will welcome a more balanced acknowledgement of our shared histories and different points of view, and appreciate the wisdom and subtlety of this contemporary approach to a significant site.

Nurturing a duty of care
This project seeks to express a deep respect for Country and all visitors to the site – past, present, and future. It recognises the site’s important historical context for all Australians – from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, acknowledges the impacts on the natural environment, and seeks to regenerate and celebrate the rich and unique natural ecology of the site.

Influencing urban planning and design of the built environment
In recognition of the continuous Indigenous presence on the site, and nurturing a duty of care for the environment, the proposed new visitor centre and its associated collection garden will be highly integrated with the landscape. It will be an adaptable space that can accommodate both indoor and outdoor programs, workshops, and performances as well as informal gatherings. Its flexibility of use will cater for a variety of events of varying scales, providing a financially sustainable asset for the community that can provide training and employment opportunities for current and future generations.

Updating recorded history
The master plan focuses on a clear, shared ambition to repair a cultural divide through respectful and considered interpretation of the site, offering multiple narratives. Formal records of Australian history, and how this is taught in the national curriculum, come from a predominantly European perspective. Guided by the master plan vision, Kamay Botany Bay can offer experiences informed by multiple perspectives, to support a balanced view and create a memorable place that respectfully conveys the significance of this site for all members of the community, including Indigenous Australians.

Lessons learnt
A project of this significance, at a local, national and international level, needs to continue with high-level, bipartisan support, and continuity of design intent. All of the contributions to the master plan were immensely important to shaping its vision, and this quality and integrity needs to carry through. Ongoing support could be provided by the community reference panel – the depth of knowledge and strategic clarity of its members was an invaluable resource during the development of the master plan.

MORE INFORMATION
GANSW policies:
- Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW
GANSW guides:
- Urban Design for Regional NSW
- Design Guide for Heritage
- Implementing Good Design: Implementing Better Placed design process into projects
GANSW projects:
- Sydney Green Grid
- Designing with Country
GANSW advisory notes:
- Collaboration
- Good design and design excellence
- Strategic visioning
- Master plans
GLOSSARY
Integrated design policy for the built environment

Creative strategies designers use in the process of designing.

A statement of aims and objectives for the physical regeneration of large areas of land or parts of the urban area. It may consider a much wider area than a master plan. It functions as the brief for potential implementation processes.

A built environment that is fair and accessible for all citizens.

The network of green spaces and water systems that deliver multiple environmental, economic, and social values and benefits to urban communities. This network includes parks and reserves, backyards and gardens, waterways and wetlands, streets and transport corridors, pathways and greenways, squares and plazas, roof gardens and living walls, sports fields and cemeteries. Green infrastructure is the web of interrelated natural systems that underpin and are integrated into our urban fabric.

A social and a physical concept – a physical setting, point, or area in space conceived and designated by people and communities. In this sense, place can describe different scales of the built environment – for example, a town is a place and a building can be a place.

A building, place, or space that can withstand or recover from difficult conditions.

A plan of action designed to achieve an aim, vision, or outcome.

A series of actions or steps taken to achieve a particular end. Design processes are not linear; they are iterative, collaborative, and circular, where feedback and ideas are intertwined and continual. Design processes help provide solutions to complex problems where many inputs and concerns are needing to be resolved.

This document refers to Aboriginal community, Traditional Custodians, and recognised knowledge-holders. It is critical that project teams ensure they are collaborating with people from the Aboriginal community with recognised links to the Country where they are working. In most cases, it is people who are from or of Country that are the Traditional Custodians. In the context of Sydney, the Aboriginal community in any given area often includes people who are from off Country (that is, their traditional Country is elsewhere in Australia). Knowledge-holders, commonly referred to as Elders, are recognised by their communities as having valuable cultural knowledge and wisdom about their Country, community and history. Knowledge-holders are regularly nominated spokespeople for that community.

However, finding the right people to talk to can be challenging – it is recommended that you start by contacting Aboriginal lands councils having jurisdiction over places where the project will be developed, followed by local Aboriginal organisations. Often local government councils have strong relationships with local Aboriginal communities and organisations and may also be able to provide assistance with contacts.

Some useful websites:
Supply Nation – supplynation.org.au

The constructed environment, understood as distinct from the natural environment. It includes all aspects of our surroundings made by people. The built environment includes cities and towns, neighbourhoods, parks, roads, buildings, infrastructure, and utilities like water and electricity.

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A building, place, or space that establishes links with its surrounds, allowing visitors and residents to move about freely and sustainably.

Country includes land, waters, and sky. It can be tangible or intangible aspects, knowledge and cultural practices, belonging and identity, wellbeing and relationships. People are part of Country.

Both a process and an outcome – a way of thinking and a result of making. For more information see Better Placed.
REFERENCES
Endnotes


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Traditional Aboriginal fish traps in Brewarrina (Ngemba Country), also known as Baiame’s Ngumnhu. Image: Destination NSW.